

THE *ILIAD* AS ETHICAL THINKING: POLITICS, PITY, AND THE OPERATION OF ESTEEM¹

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Plato's banishment of Homer from his philosophic republic is well known. The problem with the Homeric epic for Plato is that it imitates phenomenal appearance (*phainomena*) as it depicts the shadowy world of human action. Unlike Homer, whose art can tell us nothing about how to live because it merely imitates what we already do, the philosophic craft, as it draws its inspiration from the contemplation of truth, is capable of producing political judgments about what conduct makes individuals better or worse (599d). Overlaying this Platonic argument in modern times is a Kantian distinction between "pure moral philosophy" and other precepts that "may be only empirical and thus belong to anthropology" (Kant 1959.5). Moral philosophy is seen as derived from abstract and universal principles that impose a categorical duty on humans. Empirical precepts, such as norms of behavior or even ethics,² are seen as culturally grounded and, thus, not critically reflective.

Applied to the Homeric world, this distinction underlies a view, still very much a part of scholarship, of Homeric individuals as conforming

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2 Gagarin, for example, defines morality as a "disinterested concern for others" and ethics as a general cultural orientation in which norms of behavior are grounded in "prudential self-interest" (1987.287–88).

to external cultural norms rather than acting and reflecting upon internal motivations of what is morally right and wrong. In Snell's influential formulation, Homeric man lacks consciousness of himself as making moral choices and an ability to reflect on those choices.³ For Fränkel, no encounter occurs between an outside world and an "inner selfhood."⁴ Homeric individuals possess only an "elemental vitality" with which they live in the joys and sorrows of the moment and act according to the "forms" of society.⁵ Dodds 1957 employs a now famous anthropological distinction between "shame" and "guilt" cultures to describe the operation of the Homeric value system in which an individual's sense of right and wrong is governed by what the community will think of him or her rather than an internal sense of moral guilt. Redfield, in his anthropological reading, suggests that Homeric man "has no innerness" and is "incapable of development" because he "responds fully and uncritically to each situation" (1994.21). And Adkins, in seeking to reconstruct the value system of the Homeric world, argues that a sense of right and wrong does not exist, only a calculation of how to maximize one's honor through the outward display of "skill and courage."⁶ From these perspectives, neither personal decision nor judgment are possible because no image exists of oneself apart from the norms of society.⁷ Homeric man functions unreflectively as an expression of the external standards of society.

Yet, these formulations make it impossible to understand who or what is doing the conforming and how the conforming even takes place. Even Redfield, who rejects any innerness in Homeric individuals, notes that, in the "shame culture" of Homeric society, the "expressed ideal norm of the society" is "experienced with the self, as a man internalizes the anticipated judgments of others on himself" (1994.116). Honor is not just the value of a person "in the eyes of his society," but, as Pitt-Rivers notes, it "is the value of a person in his own eyes" (1974.21). Honor, and its sanction of shame, provide "a nexus between the ideals of a society and their reproduction in

3 Snell 1930. See also Snell 1982 and Erbse 1986, 1990.

4 Fränkel 1962.89/1975.80. See also Böhme 1929.76.

5 Live in the moment: Fränkel 1962.93/1975.84; see also Schadewaldt 1959.266–67 and 1955.137–38. Act according to forms of society: Fränkel 1962.89/1975.80; see also Auerbach 1953, Bakhtin 1981, and Finley 1979.25, 113, 115.

6 Adkins 1960.55. See also Adkins 1982 and Havelock 1963, 1978.

7 Critiques and modifications of these arguments have been offered by Wolff 1929, Whitman 1958, Long 1970, Lloyd-Jones 1971, Sharples 1983, Gaskin 1990, Schmitt 1990, Williams 1993, Cairns 1993, Yamagata 1994, Zanker 1994, and Gill 1996.

the individual through his aspiration to personify them” (Pitt-Rivers 1974.22). The recognition of how one’s actions might damage or enhance one’s status, suggests Cairns, requires “a subjective idea of one’s own worth, an ideal self-image which is placed under threat, and an awareness of the standards under which one is liable to be criticized” or praised (1993.142). The claim by an individual that he or she was inappropriately dishonored, for example, rests upon a particular image and valuation of oneself as deserving honor. I follow Cairns in his characterization of this valuation of oneself as “self-esteem.”⁸

This notion of esteem, as Ricoeur has argued in considerable detail, is critical for understanding the activity of ethical reflection (see especially Ricoeur 1992). Esteem should not be interpreted as denoting either an authentic, inner self or, as Whitman suggests, an essential and universal human dignity (see Whitman 1958). Rather, esteem becomes an aspect of an ethical stance in which one’s own sense of “what kind of person one is and would like to be” necessarily involves questions of how this self relates to “the demands, needs, claims, desires, and, generally, the lives of other people.”⁹ Esteem, to be sure, defined culturally as one’s sense of oneself, is tied to the expectations of society. But the ethical self is not simply a reflection or mirror of community norms. The ethical self is an enacted self that must interpret and apply the standards of a community as well as encounter occasions in which community expectations are ambiguous, contradictory, or unsatisfactory. The issue of self-esteem is at the core of these enactments as one’s image of oneself guides the choices one makes “with and for others” (Ricoeur 1992.180–94). A reflectiveness is introduced, as well, as one comes to recognize how these choices, in turn, affect oneself and others (see Aristotle *Poetics* 1452a16–21). My argument in this essay is that Achilles’ ethical stance is linked to a sense of his esteem, *as an image of himself in relationship to others*.

This focus on esteem will serve as a complement in some ways, a corrective in others, to recent discussions of Achilles’ ethical transformation. For Crotty, Achilles initially has only “the most rudimentary sense of

8 Cairns 1993.16. No Greek term corresponds to the term “self-esteem.” Cairns has made a strong argument for showing how *aidôs* and terms used in conjunction with *aidôs* involve issues of esteem. Though I begin with this notion of esteem, I seek to justify its usage in my argument.

9 Cairns 1993.21, Williams 1985. See also Ricoeur 1992.172 and Rawls 1971.440–46 (1999.386–91).

self,” a sense of self that is simply reactive to challenges to his superiority. Achilles’ grief over the death of Patroklos, however, allows Achilles later to “sense vividly” the suffering of Priam (1994.75). In generalizing “from his experience” to Priam’s, Achilles “re-forms or restructures his sense of himself” in order to appreciate “the similarity of another’s experience to his own” (1994.78–79). Crotty writes, “In appreciating his resemblance to another, Achilles no longer confines his reactions to the immediate stimulus, but can see in another’s distress the kind of danger to which he is *in general*, or *as a kind of being*, exposed” (1994.79, emphasis in original). What becomes difficult to reconcile is the two people that Crotty portrays as Achilles. Up through Book 23, Achilles appears as Fränkel’s “Homeric man” who, because he lacks innerness, can only react to “external stimuli” (1994.79 note 6). In Book 24, Achilles appears as a “more complex self”: he is able to reflect on the experiences of others and establish new bonds outside the conventions of a warrior society (1994.79, 6, 8). Rather than positing a reactive and reflective Achilles, I will suggest that we can better trace in Achilles a clarified sense of his own esteem in response to different experiences of suffering: the suffering of battle, the loss of Patroklos, and the pain excited by the sight of Priam.

Zanker, too, sees a “change of heart” in which the “affective drives” of pity, respect, and affection are emphasized in Achilles’ actions toward Priam (1996.73, 125). This heroic magnanimity, as Zanker describes it, is made possible by Achilles’ “unique experience and knowledge of death” (1996.125). Through his “deepened sense of mortality” and his “personal realization of the reality of death,” Achilles acquires a “totality” of “vision” that is unique among mortals and “outstrips even that of the gods” (1996.73, 97, 125). With this vision, Achilles is able to “attain to the companionship in suffering that he shares with Priam and the sublime generosity that he shows toward him” (1996.125).

Zanker is not alone in emphasizing the importance of death in affecting the transformation or reintegration of Achilles.¹⁰ These formula-

10 See Burkert 1955, Segal 1971, Atchity 1978.164 and 1980, MacLeod 1982, Schein 1984, King 1987, Lynn-George 1988, Griffin 1980, Beye 1993, Crotty 1994, and Muellner 1996. Griffin writes that, with the death of Patroklos, Achilles now “accepts his own death” (1980.96). In fact, what is distinctive about Achilles is that “he is able to contemplate and accept his own death more fully and more passionately than any other hero” (95). Segal also suggests that, “Achilles shows an awareness of death as part of a more comprehensive order” (1971.73).

tions are ambiguous, though, for it remains unclear what, precisely, it means to “accept” or “face” or have a “deeper” sense of one’s death, and how this is related in turn to a changed comprehension of human relationships. Tying Achilles’ development to his distinctive knowledge of death is particularly tricky because Achilles already has knowledge of his death that surpasses in certainty and clarity the knowledge of every other warrior. Yet, with this depth of knowledge, Achilles chooses variously not to fight, to fight savagely, and then to postpone fighting. In understanding Achilles, we may wish to avoid a language of comparatives (greater, lesser, deeper, fuller) in talking about death. This language creates ambiguities precisely because it implies a scale of measure that does not exist. We may better speak of how Achilles comes to understand death differently, and how that difference is related to a changing notion of esteem (as an image of himself in relationship to others).

Whatever his faults, the Achilles of Books 1 and 9 is neither simply reactive nor unwilling to face his death. Achilles’ response to the loss of his war prize arises from a sense of esteem that he shares with the rest of the Achaians: esteem is tied to the receipt of honor and glory from the community. When the community fails to show gratitude for his fighting, the struggle of battle appears not as an heroic pursuit of glory but as a rather humiliating submission to suffering. For Achilles, the reciprocal bonds of a warrior society, in which struggle in battle enhances one’s worth, are severed. Achilles sees himself as able to restore his worth by inflicting suffering without, in turn, suffering. Through the death of Patroklos, however, Achilles’ own sense of himself becomes implicated in the suffering of another. This awareness of how he is implicated in the suffering of another provides the foundation, in turn, for a more generalized expression of pity toward Priam. This awareness has political significance as it addresses the fundamental political problem that is raised in the *Iliad*: how can communities endure in a world of human collisions in which we suffer for deeds that we can neither foresee nor control?

THE VIOLATION OF ESTEEM AND ACHILLES’ WITHDRAWAL FROM SUFFERING

Agamemnon’s act of taking Achilles’ war prize occurs against a backdrop in which esteem is closely bound to the honor and glory a warrior will receive. Honor and glory serve to orient a warrior’s actions by indicating what constitutes a worthwhile human life. The warrior sees it as a duty

(*chrê*) to fight bravely since the community provides him with material honors, such as the “choice meats and the filled wine cups,” as well as good farmland (12.310–17). Furthermore, the sense of a worthwhile life, as one that most approximates the divine, leads the warrior to seek glory: an immortality of remembrance that can be given only by the community. In a pause between the sorrow of the day’s battle and the anticipation of the renewal of battle in the morning, Hektor captures this desire: “Oh, if I only / could be as this in all my days immortal (*athanatos*) and ageless (*agêrôs*) / and be held in honour (*tioimên*) as Athene and Apollo are honoured” (8.538–40).¹¹ Every warrior recognizes that this timelessness is ultimately unachievable because mortals die. But, as Sarpedon notes in his conversation with Glaukos, humans risk death in war “where men win glory” (*kudianeiran*) precisely because they are not immortal (12.325).

Though the willingness to risk one’s life in battle is oriented by the prospect of rewards, this willingness is deeply infused with a warrior’s image of himself. This image is, itself, complex. In part, a warrior’s image of himself is defined by how he wants to appear to others. Occasions are not difficult to find in the *Iliad* in which warriors are praised or rebuked for failing to live up to this image in the eyes of others. But a warrior internalizes this image as well, so that these excellences come to define what he values in himself. Williams argues that this “internalised other” may have an ethical dimension when this other is defined as “one whose reactions I would respect” and “someone who would respect these same reactions if they were appropriately directed to him” (1993.84). When faced with the real possibility of his death in battle, for example, Odysseus debates with himself about whether to fight or run. Odysseus at one point speaks to his “great-hearted spirit: / Ah me, what will become of me? It will be a great evil / if I run, fearing their multitude, yet deadlier if I am caught / alone” (11.403–06). Yet, Odysseus’s mind quickly moves from thinking about his death to thinking about his thinking about death: “Yet still, why does the heart within me debate on these things?” asks Odysseus (11.407). “Cowards,” after all, think about these things and “walk out of the fighting,” whereas the hero “must by all means / stand his ground strongly, whether he be struck or strike down another” (11.408–10). Decisions to fight bravely and risk one’s life reveal aspects of a Homeric ethic, as they involve “the

11 All translations are from Lattimore 1951, unless noted otherwise.

question of what constitutes a worthwhile *human* life, a life lived in the awareness of one's mortality."¹² For Odysseus, as for Sarpedon and Hektor, a sense of their worth as warriors—as that sense is reinforced by cultural expressions of gratitude, the prospect of immortality, and injunctions of shame—underlies their willingness to risk their lives on behalf of the community.

When Agamemnon takes back Briseis in front of others, Agamemnon violates Achilles' sense of worth, bringing "disgrace" (*asuphêlon*) to him (9.647). For Achilles, whose worth is tied to the receipt of honor and glory, the denial of compensatory gratitude (*charis*) by the community leads him to ask (quite sensibly) why he continues to fight. Absent the receipt of gratitude, Achilles' willingness to risk his life appears downright foolish. He portrays himself at one point as a "dishonored vagabond" (9.648: *atimêton metanastên*) who can be abused without any of the protections of society.¹³ And he likens himself, as well, to a mother bird who "brings back / morsels" for her young, "but as for herself it is suffering (*kakôs*)" (9.323–24). Both images speak to the same issue: Achilles' image of himself is not that of the warrior who is honored for fighting bravely at the forefront of battle but that of someone who simply "suffers-from" the afflictions of war.¹⁴ So Achilles declares, "Nothing is won for me, now that my heart has gone through its afflictions (*algea*) / in forever setting my life on the hazard of battle" (9.321–22).

The Embassy attempts to appeal to Achilles' sense of esteem in two ways. First, they offer to honor him as a god by repaying him with "many and gracious (*charienta*) gifts" (9.599, 603, 302–03). Such gratitude is meant to compensate for the disgrace by showing the community's esteem for Achilles. The attempt fails because Achilles no longer ties the worth of his life to the receipt of honor and glory. When Achilles says that, "Fate (*moira*) is the same (*isê*) for the man who holds back, the same if he fights hard" (9.318), he is not departing substantially in words from Hektor's statement earlier in the *Iliad* that "no man has yet escaped it [fate] / once it has taken its first form, neither brave man nor coward" (6.488–89). What is different is how death orients action. The prospect of death leads Hektor to

12 Gill 1996.136, emphasis in original. See also Griffin 1980.93.

13 On Achilles as vagabond, see Hammer forthcoming, chapter 4.

14 I use the term "suffering-from" to distinguish it from the experience that I will call "suffering-with." The distinction extends Ricoeur 1992.90.

do “some big thing first, that men to come shall know of it” (22.305). For Achilles, death does not hold out the possibility of something beyond it, such as immortality, but, in Heidegger’s words, it “*lays claim*” to his individual existence (1979.308, emphasis in original).

The point here is not that Achilles now valorizes life, though he certainly wants to live. Rather, he comes to view his life from the perspective of his death. When Achilles exclaims, “A man dies still if he has done nothing, as one who has done much” (9.320), he is speaking about how life is defined by death rather than how a life, through the performance of great words and deeds, defines a death. Not only is “nothing” won for Achilles “in forever setting [his] life on the hazard of battle” (9.321–22), but nothing can be won. There is an irretrievability to life that is, thus, unlike any material rewards that can be bestowed upon an individual. Possessions can be won and lost. But “a man’s life cannot come back again, it cannot be lifted / nor captured again by force, once it has crossed the teeth’s barrier” (9.408–09). Achilles understands his own life as being carried (*pheremen*) by his two fates toward his end in death (*thanatoio telosde*) (9.411). He can either fight where his death will come quickly and everlasting glory (*kleos aphthiton*) will be his (9.413) or return home where “there will be a long (*dêron*) life / left for me, and my end in death will not come to me quickly” (*oude ke m’ ôka telos thanatoio kicheiê*, 9.415–16).¹⁵ As Achilles comes to define the worth (*antaxion*) of his life by its end in death (9.401), nothing the community can offer will suffice.

The Embassy appeals to Achilles’ esteem in a second way: by suggesting that it is not like him to have a pitiless (*nêlees*) heart (9.496–97). That is, the Embassy compares an ideal image of Achilles, as one who has compassion for his comrades, with his actions. This appeal has two components. First, Odysseus asks that Achilles, even if he still hates Agamemnon and his gifts, “at least take pity (*eleaire*) on all the other / Achaians, who are afflicted along the host” (9.300–01). Odysseus’s distinction points to one aspect of the operation of pity that Aristotle will later describe: pity arises from the sight of pain that befalls one who does not deserve (*anaxiou*) it.¹⁶ In this case, even if Agamemnon deserves to suffer, Odysseus’s reasoning

15 See Zanker, who suggests that Achilles narrows the meaning of *moira* from portion to simply death (1996.81).

16 Aristotle *Rhet.* II.viii.2. Helpful in my thinking about the expression of pity is Konstan 1999.

goes, the rest of the Achaians do not. Second, Odysseus attempts to implicate Achilles in the suffering of others. He tells Achilles that, “It will be an affliction (*achos*) to you hereafter, there will be no remedy / found to heal the evil (*kakou*) thing when it has been done” (9.249–50). The suggestion here is that pity functions when, in Aristotle’s words, the pitier expects that the evil may come to himself or his friends (*Rhet.* II.viii.2). That is, pity rests upon some vulnerability to suffering. The appeal to pity by the Embassy should not surprise us since, as Zanker has demonstrated, pity functions in a warrior society as a motive for “cooperative behavior” (1996.23). Zanker suggests that the appeal to pity fails because Achilles is thrown back on the “impulses of emotion.”¹⁷ This formulation is too general, for the emotions play a part both in Achilles’ rejection of the appeal to pity in Book 9 and in his later responsiveness to Priam’s appeal to pity in Book 24. The question is why the same appeal results in two different impulses. The answer, I suggest, lies in how Achilles sees that his esteem is at stake in these encounters.

When Agamemnon takes Briseis, Achilles views himself treated as though he lacked value or worth. This slight (*oligôria*) precipitates a pain that expresses itself as anger.¹⁸ Anger appears as a desire for revenge toward those implicated in the slight. Achilles, thus, seeks to restore his worth by humiliating those who brought this pain. Achilles’ anger is directed most immediately toward Agamemnon. But he desires to use all the Achaians to avenge himself on Agamemnon since he holds the other warriors culpable for allowing Agamemnon to take back the prize (see 1.126 and 16.17–18). As Achilles swears to Agamemnon upon departing the camp, “some day longing (*pothê*) for Achilleus will come to the sons of the Achaians, / all of them. Then stricken at heart (*achnumenos*) though you be, you will be able / to do nothing, when in their numbers before man-slaughtering Hektor / they drop and die. And then you will eat out the heart within you / in sorrow (*chôomenos*), that you did no honour to the best of the Achaians” (1.240–44). Where the suffering of a fallen comrade often elicits pity that serves as an impetus for another warrior to fight harder and win more honor (see 5.561, 5.610, 13.346, 17.352), in Achilles’ case, the suffering of his comrades because of his withdrawal from battle only serves to heighten his sense

17 This is the argument of Zanker 1996.92.

18 Aristotle *Rhet.* II.ii.3. For statements of Achilles’ anger, see 1.192, 1.224, 9.260–61, 9.299, and 9.646.

of honor. This honor comes from Zeus, who insures the fulfillment of Achilles' oath of vengeance (9.608).

The appeal to pity also fails because Achilles does not see himself as vulnerable to suffering, since he no longer attaches his esteem to dying for others. Rather, he retreats precisely to remove himself from the thankless suffering that he had experienced earlier. In this liminal realm between home and battle, he comes to view the possibilities of his life—whether to return home to his father and live a long life or win glory and have a short life—as unaffected by the actions of others.¹⁹ As Achilles replies to Aias, “I shall not think (*medêsomai*) again of the bloody fighting” until the Trojans have arrived and set fire to the ships of the Achaians (9.650–53). His own ships, as he points out, will remain safe (9.654–55). In this solitary stance, Achilles defines a happy life as one in which he can inflict suffering while not, in turn, suffering.

ESTEEM AS “BEING RESPONSIBLE FOR”

In contrast to Achilles, Patroklos is moved by the suffering (*achos*) that has befallen the Achaians (16.22). Patroklos exclaims that Achilles is pitiless in his unwillingness to help (16.33) and dons Achilles' armor to fight in his absence.²⁰ Patroklos's death, as has been often noted, has the narrative function of bringing Achilles back into battle. As Nagy argues, for the “uninvolved audience of epic,” the death of Patroklos and the pain Achilles feels is the “subject for *kleos*” (1979.113). By avenging Patroklos's death, Achilles will achieve *kleos* in “the epic tradition itself” as his story will be worthy of being told (1979.97). Pain and glory, Nagy notes, operate at two levels in the epic. The glory of Achilles is heard and celebrated by the audience of the epic, but the pain is experienced as unforgettable by the characters involved.²¹

19 Heidegger 1979.308. I differ here from arguments that Achilles is articulating a new ethic of the will. See, for example, Arieti 1986.14.

20 Sinos sees Patroklos's entrance into battle as a ritual substitute for Achilles' unwillingness to recognize his obligations to the *philoî*. “Patroklos recognizes the social obligation of Achilles to the *philoî*; it is he who dies for the *philoî*, but *as* Achilles. His act is a *ritual* act uniting the *philoî* with Achilles, in the person of the substitute, Patroklos” (Sinos 1980.42, emphasis in original).

21 See Nagy 1979.97–102. Muellner 1996 does not sustain this distinction in his discussion of Achilles. Rather, he describes Achilles' actions and reactions only at the level of epic convention. This is why Muellner does not see Achilles as an ethical actor but rather as being “propel[led]” by the “poem's overall teleology and conventions” (1996.161).

The pain that Achilles experiences from the loss of Patroklos recasts his earlier understanding of pain that caused him to withdraw from battle. Achilles saw himself before as “suffering-from” the dishonor brought about by Agamemnon. Achilles’ response is one of anger: he seeks to restore his esteem by reversing this suffering, inflicting pain upon others while being removed from the infliction of pain by others. With the death of Patroklos, though, Achilles experiences a “suffering-with,” in which his own pain is connected to the suffering of another.²² I do not mean that Achilles either feels the other person’s pain or that he no longer has a sense of suffering-from the afflictions of war. Achilles clearly feels anger toward Hektor, for example (see 15.68). What is different is that Achilles is unable to disassociate himself, and his own sense of esteem, from the loss of another. This sense of suffering-with has cognitive significance, for it alters both Achilles’ sense of esteem for himself and his esteem for another. As his suffering-with reveals his fundamental connectedness to Patroklos, Achilles begins to see himself as the occasion for (if not the cause of) Patroklos’s death. Achilles begins to articulate a sense of “being responsible for” the death of Patroklos.²³ This responsibility is not so much the attribution of himself as a cause as a statement of Achilles’ own failure to stand by (or be responsible for) Patroklos.

Esteem for Oneself and Vulnerability to Another

Upon hearing of Patroklos’s death, Achilles pours dust on his head and face as he “fouled (*êischune*) his handsome countenance” (18.24) and “defiled” (*êischune*) his hair (18.27). Removed from the disgrace others can bring to him, Achilles now debases himself. The verb *aischunô* is used most frequently in the *Iliad* to describe the shame brought to another through the mutilation and defilement of a corpse (see 18.180, 22.75, 24.418).²⁴ As Vernant notes in describing the relationship between the “heroic ideal and the mutilation of the corpse,” the “hero’s beautiful death, which grants him eternal glory,” has as its corollary “the disfigurement and debasement of the dead opponent’s body, so as to deny him access to the memory of men to

22 “To suffer-with another” appears in classical Greek as *sullupeiisthai* and is associated with a feeling for one who is intimate. The term does not appear in the *Iliad*, but I think this sense is conveyed in Achilles’ reaction to the death of Patroklos.

23 I draw on Heidegger 1979.327 for the sense of “being responsible for.”

24 See Cairns 1993.57–58.

come.”²⁵ In this case, Achilles defiles himself and, in fact, remains covered in filth after he kills Hektor and even after the Achaians implore him to wash himself (23.40–42).²⁶ Achilles’ actions can be understood as arising from a sense of shame in which his “whole being seems diminished or lessened.” Achilles’ sense of unworthiness expresses itself in a “desire to disappear” (Williams 1993.89).

With the death of Patroklos, Achilles experiences suffering as a loss of a part of himself.²⁷ This loss is significant in altering Achilles’ claim to happiness.²⁸ When Thetis reminds Achilles that everything he has asked for “has been brought to accomplishment (*tetelestai*) / through Zeus” (18.74–75), she recalls Achilles’ own words to the Embassy that he does not need the honor of others because he is already honored by Zeus (9.607–08). Yet, even with Zeus’s honor, Achilles declares that there is no “pleasure (*êdos*) in this to me, since my dear (*philos*) companion has perished” (18.80). Where previously the anticipation of death led Achilles to a sense of the singularity of his own life, it now leads him to place his life in a relational context,

25 Vernant 1991.67. See also Segal 1971.

26 This scene is often interpreted as a prefiguring of Achilles’ own death. On the relationship between Patroklos’s and Achilles’ death, see Schadewaldt 1959.155–202, Schein 1984.129–33, and Muellner 1996.155–69.

27 In characterizing this mourning for Patroklos, Crotty suggests that it bears a similarity to the expression of pity (*eleos*), an expression that Crotty will suggest is later extended to Priam. For Crotty, “the appeal of pity is seen at its clearest in the context of intimate relations” where “the plight of one” becomes another’s “own plight” (Crotty 1994.46, 48). There is considerable ambiguity in Crotty’s argument at this point. He does not want to suggest that pity and mourning are the same things. Pity becomes something like a second-order mourning: pity arises from the memory of mourning (1994.75). This distinction between pity and mourning is blurred, however, when Crotty uses Achilles’ mourning for Patroklos as an example of the visceral character of pity in his chapter, “*Eleos* and the Warrior Society” (1994.49–50). The difficulty with associating Achilles’ mourning for Patroklos with pity is that Achilles is never described after the death of Patroklos as pitying either Patroklos or himself. I think the reason the language of pity is not used lies in Achilles’ closeness to Patroklos. There are three occasions in which intimates are associated with pity: Andromaches’ appeal to Hektor (6.407, 431), Achilles’ response to Patroklos’s crying (16.50), and Priam’s appeal to Hektor (22.59, 82). Not only do these appeals fail, suggesting that pity is not most powerfully felt among intimates, but they are a minority of usages in the *Iliad*. More often, some distance exists between the pitier and the pitied, such as the pity of a god or the pity for one’s comrades. To see an intimate (*oikeiotata*) suffer, as Aristotle suggests, is not to feel pity but to feel oneself suffer as the other person (Aristotle *Rhet.* II.viii.12).

28 Muellner describes this alienation of Achilles from himself (1996.136–43), but does not ascribe any cognitive status to this alienation.

suggesting that he loved Patroklos “equal to (*ison*) my own life” (18.82, trans. modified). This equality makes it impossible for Achilles to see his life as simply his own because he now shares it with another.

Achilles articulates a close connection between his own sense of esteem and his failure to take care of another. His failure to act stands out in his mind because of his strength, “as no other of the bronze-armored Achaians in battle” (18.105–06). In describing himself as a “useless weight on the good land” (*etôsion achthos arourês*, 18.104), he connects his worth to a failure to take care of another. In Achilles’ words, “I was not to stand by my companion / when he was killed” (18.98–99). Patroklos perished, laments Achilles, because he “lacked my fighting strength to defend him” (18.99–100). Not only was Achilles “no light of safety to Patroklos,” but he was no help to “my other companions, who in their numbers went down before glorious Hektor” (18.103–04). Achilles portrays himself as an individual who had failed to care for his comrades.²⁹

Achilles’ response to the death of Patroklos seems to point toward a recognition of a more complex operation of fate than he had suggested earlier, a recognition that underlies this changing notion of esteem. In Book 9, Achilles declares that there is an equality (*isê*) of fate in which death comes to both the brave man and the coward (9.318). Equality appears in the finality of death that all mortals face “alike” (*homôs*) (9.320), but this is an equality in which individuals are alike but not necessarily connected. After the death of Patroklos, Achilles comes to express a different relationship between equality and fate. Achilles points to an equality in which fates, such as the relationship between Patroklos and Achilles, become shared through an inextricable connection between one life and another. Fate is no longer an individual possession but a nexus created by the intertwining of choices and actions. When Achilles says that he will avenge Patroklos’s death by killing Hektor, Thetis reminds him that his fated death (*potmos*) will follow (18.96). Achilles seems to recognize the necessary consequences of his choice when he answers: “Then I shall die (*autika tethnaiên*), since (*epei*) I was not to stand by my companion / when he was killed” (18.98–99, trans. modified).

This notion of fatefulness, in which destinies are fulfilled through

29 I disagree with Sinos when he claims that “Achilles’ only recognition of his social obligation to the φίλοι is, as we might expect, linked with the name Patroklos” (1980.43). The death of Patroklos certainly precipitates the remorse, but it is a remorse (and a sense of responsibility) that is specifically extended to his treatment of his other companions.

their intersection and collision with one another, is integral to the narrative construction of Achilles' situation. In the opening verse of the *Iliad*, Homer portends this collision, as men are "set together" (*xuneêke*) (1.8). The audience, like the gods, witness these collisions throughout the *Iliad*, while Achilles sees himself not as a part of but as willing these collisions. The death of Patroklos changes that, as it demonstrates the impossibility of a withdrawal from a world of collisions. The knowledge of destiny that Achilles possesses is not wrong so much as incomplete because it does not, and cannot, account for the connectedness of humans to each other. As Achilles observes in his lament for Patroklos, "It was an empty word (*halion epos*) I cast forth on that day / when in his halls I tried to comfort the hero Menoitios. / I told him I would bring back his son in glory to Opous / with Ilion sacked, and bringing his share of war spoils allotted. / But Zeus does not bring to accomplishment (*teleutai*) all thoughts in men's minds (*andressi noêmata panta*). / Thus it is destiny for us both to stain the same soil / here in Troy" (*amphô gar peprôtai homoiên gaian ereusai autou eni Troiêi*, 18.324–28). Hera confirms the incompleteness of Achilles' knowledge when she responds to Zeus that, "Even one who is mortal will try to accomplish his purpose / for another, though he be a man and knows (*oide*) not such wisdom (*mêdea*) as we do" (18.362–63). What Achilles cannot know is that he cannot confine the consequences of his actions to punishing Agamemnon. Instead, Achilles' decisions affect, in unintended and unanticipated ways, both Patroklos and himself. We see the beginning of an enlarged sense of Achilles' connectedness to others: he is not simply a cause of troubles for others, but vulnerable to their suffering (see Arendt 1958.190).

Esteem and the Distinctiveness of Another

Through the death of Patroklos, Achilles experiences not only vulnerability to the suffering of another but also a longing that, ironically, he had promised the Achaians would feel for him (1.240–44). Something has changed in the nature of this longing, however. Where the longing of the Achaians would be based on Achilles' value to them in war, the longing that Achilles now experiences is for the loss of one who is irreplaceable. Even after Achilles has avenged Patroklos's death and honored him with a funeral, Achilles' "longing (*patheôn*) for Patroklos" continues, as he misses "his manhood and his great strength / and all the actions he had seen to the end with him, and the hardships / he had suffered" (24.6–8).

Relevant here is Aristotle's discussion of the motivations for friend-

ship based on pleasure, utility, or a love of another's character (*NE* 1156a–1157a). We do not have to read Aristotle's categories back into the *Iliad* to see how Achilles' regard for his comrades is expressed earlier almost solely in terms of how they can serve the ends of his desire for vengeance. Even when Patroklos comes weeping to Achilles because of the pain (*achos*) that has befallen the Achaians (16.22), Achilles' response is carefully cloaked in instrumental language. Achilles allows Patroklos (at Patroklos's urging) to defend the ships so that the Trojans will not "take away our desired home-coming" (16.82). Moreover, he tells Patroklos to "obey to the end this word I put upon your attention / so that (*hôs*) you can win, for me, great honor and glory / in the sight of all the Danaans, so they will bring back to me / the lovely girl, and give me shining gifts in addition" (16.83–86). Achilles, to be sure, does not want Patroklos to die. But Achilles defines Patroklos' reentrance into battle almost solely in terms of how Patroklos (without dying) can serve Achilles' desire for vengeance.

Achilles never strays very far from esteem for Patroklos. With his death, though, Achilles recognizes and articulates more fully his relationship with Patroklos as esteem for another who is distinctive.³⁰ In the midst of desecrating Hektor's corpse, Achilles declares: "I will not forget him (*ouk epilêsomai*), never so long as / I remain among the living and my knees have their spring beneath me. / And though the dead forget (*katalêthont'*) the dead in the house of Hades, / even there I shall still remember (*memnêsomai*) my beloved (*philou*) companion" (22.387–90). The poignancy of this statement is suggestive of the depth of the friendship. Nothing is to be gained, even potentially, from Achilles' promise of a continued enactment of his relationship to his slain friend. But this invocation is still more suggestive. Where relationships based on pleasure or usefulness are necessarily temporary, dissolving once the motives behind them disappear, true friendships endure because they are based on an attitude of esteem (Aristotle *NE* 1156a, 1157b). As Aristotle notes, "When friends live together, they enjoy each other's presence, and provide each other's good. When, however, they are asleep or separated geographically, they do not actively engage in their friendship, but they are still characterized by an attitude which could express itself in active friendship. For it is not friendship in the unqualified sense but

30 See also Ricoeur, who describes this esteem as a love of "the other *as being the man he is*" (1992.183, emphasis in original).

only its activity that is interrupted by distance” (NE 1157b: Aristotle 1962). Through memory, Achilles’ esteem for Patroklos will endure despite the separation of death.

Achilles comes to express, in addition, that which is distinctive in his comrades. Most notably, he awards an extra fifth prize to Nestor in the funeral games, even though Nestor does not compete. As Achilles explains, “I give you this prize / for the giving (*autôs*); since never again will you fight with your fists nor wrestle, / nor enter the field for the spear-throwing, nor race / on your feet; since now the hardship of old age is upon you” (23.620–23). Achilles’ esteem for Nestor is decoupled explicitly from any further contribution the old man can make. And Nestor, in fact, seems to recognize this as he expresses gratitude “that you have remembered (*memnêsai*) me and my kindness (*enêeos*), that I am not forgotten (*lêthô*)” (23.648).

I have suggested thus far that Achilles’ feelings of loss and pain with the death of Patroklos have cognitive significance. These feelings bear directly on the relationship between esteem and ethical orientation. Earlier, in reaction to a perceived violation of his worth, Achilles withdrew from battle, seeking to inflict suffering without suffering in turn. With the death of Patroklos, Achilles is faced with the impossibility of separating his own suffering from the loss of another. This experience exposes the untenability of Achilles’ earlier stance. His sense of esteem, as an image of his worth in relation to others, is modified in two ways. First, as his sense of esteem is now made vulnerable to the loss of another, he comes to define his own worth as premised on a sense of responsibility or care for his intimate friends and comrades.³¹ Second, this care rests upon esteem for others as distinctive (rather than as instruments of his revenge). What begins to emerge in the context of intimacy and friendship is esteem for himself as connected to, and bearing some responsibility for, the care and suffering of distinctive others. This altered sense of his esteem for himself and esteem for another will provide the basis for Achilles’ response to Priam in Book 24.

ESTEEM AND THE EXPRESSION OF PITY

The pain of Patroklos’s death does not unite Achilles with others. Achilles’ response to the pain is to transfer his anger and desire for ven-

31 Both intimates and comrades are referred to as *philos*. See Benveniste for a discussion of the “complex network of associations” referred to by *philos* (1973.288).

geance from Agamemnon and the Achaïans to Hektor and the Trojans (see 19.35, 56–73).³² The incommunicability of the pain leads him to stand apart from the other Achaïans. The boundlessness of the pain leads him to slaughter endlessly. And the inconsolability of the pain leads him not just to kill Hektor but to attempt to desecrate the corpse beyond recognition. This suffering, as we have seen, underlies Achilles' sense of being responsible for Patroklos. But this suffering also leads to an inconsolability that threatens, again, to isolate Achilles.

Against this backdrop of suffering, the poet creates a space in which Achilles and Priam meet. There is both a literal and figurative aspect to this space. Homer describes the contours of this bounded space as a "towering shelter" (*klisiên*) that is surrounded by a "courtyard" with "hedge-poles set close together" (*pukinoisi*)" (24.448–49, 452–43). The importance of this architectural image is that it conveys in physical terms the existence of a bounded space in which Priam and Achilles meet. Figuratively, this space is constituted by a pain that both separates and gathers the two men (see Heidegger 1971a.204). Achilles' and Priam's pain cannot be compensated, and their grievances with each other cannot be resolved. But the pain that initially separates them—the grief that Priam and Achilles have brought to each other—is now brought into a common outline. The space of meeting, established in conflict, now brings into the open "the intimacy with which opponents belong to each other."³³ They appear to each other with the physical marks of their suffering-with another. Achilles, in his longing for Patroklos, and Priam, as he mourns the loss of Hektor, have both defiled themselves (18.22–27, 22.414, 24.162–65), suffered sleepless nights (24.3–13, 24.637–39), and gone without food (19.209–14, 19.303–08, 24.641–42).³⁴

Crotty and Seaford both have shown how this meeting between Priam and Achilles draws upon rituals of supplication to invoke recognizable patterns of interaction "between individuals from different social units" (Seaford 1994.10) in order to bring an end to Achilles' lamentation (Seaford 1994.174) and to establish some solidarity between Priam and Achilles

32 Lord suggests that the death of Patroklos marks a change in the pattern of the story from a "pattern of the wrath" of Achilles, which leads to his withdrawal, to one of a "feud" with Hektor, which leads to his return (1960.150).

33 Heidegger 1971b.63. Crotty suggests that the performance of the ceremony of supplication gives rise to a "transient, but profound, 'community'" between Achilles and Priam (1994.21).

34 See Richardson 1985.344.

(Seaford 1994.10 and Crotty 1994.83). I would suggest, as well, that this gathering is made possible by an ethical stance that, in its most fundamental sense, allows distinctive others to appear. This ethic is premised on the sense of esteem for oneself and another that is now generalized by Achilles from the intimacy of friendship to pity for an enemy.

Priam begins his appeal to Achilles by beseeching him to “remember your father, one who / is of years like mine, and on the door-sill of sorrowful age” (24.486–87). As Crotty notes (1994.75–76), Priam attempts to establish a resemblance to Peleus as Priam describes the possibility that those “who dwell nearby encompass him [Peleus] and afflict him, / nor is there any to defend him against the wrath, the destruction” (24.488–89). But Priam as carefully distinguishes between his plight and Peleus’s. Priam emphasizes in his next line that this harm has not yet fallen upon Peleus: “Yet surely he [Peleus], when he hears of you and that you are still living / is gladdened within his heart and all his days he is hopeful / that he will see his beloved son come home from the Troad” (24.490–92). Peleus’s hopes are, of course, in vain. But this qualification by Priam, which is seldom discussed, is crucial for understanding the distinction between the activity of mourning and the expression of pity.³⁵ Where the pain of mourning is the immediate loss of oneself caused by the loss of another who is intimate, the pain of pity arises from the sight of pain befalling another that one fears may, *in the future*, come upon oneself or one who is close. Priam establishes a resemblance to Achilles’ father, but does not establish an identity. A distance is maintained between the pitier and pitied that befits the relationship between the supplicated and suppliant.³⁶ Priam does not say, “Remember the suffering of your father and, from there, you can understand my suffering.” He says, “Remember your father who may soon suffer as I do now.”

35 Rabel characterizes Priam’s appeal as “rhetorically inept” and reflective of the “narrator’s habitual irony” (1997.201–02).

36 There is practical reason, as well, why Priam does not attempt to identify with Peleus, and that is that Achilles would then be cast as Hektor. That, of course, would be unacceptable to Achilles. And Priam notes the difference. Though Peleus may still have hope, “But for me, my destiny was evil (*panapotmos*). I have had the noblest / of sons in Troy, but I say not one of them is left to me” (24.493–94). The one who was left and “who guarded my city and people, that one / you killed a few days since as he fought in defense of his country” (24.499–500). Priam has now lost everything, having “gone through what no other mortal on earth has gone through” (24.503–05). He ends with an expression of supplication, “I put my lips to the hands of the man who has killed my children” (24.506).

Achilles' initial response to Priam's supplication is not pity but mourning. Priam's words, as they recall images of suffering, "stirred" (*ôrse*) in Achilles "a passion of grieving (*gooio*) / for his own father" (24.507–08). Achilles pushes away Priam's hand gently, transforming their relationship into one of mourning (*stonachê*) (24.512). The "two remembered, as Priam sat huddled / at the feet of Achilles and wept for man-slaughtering Hektor / and Achilles wept now for his own father, now again / for Patroklos" (24.509–12). Depicted here is the expression of loss as Priam weeps for Hektor and Achilles weeps over the death of Patroklos and the knowledge that he will never see his father again.

Only after Achilles "had taken full satisfaction in sorrow (*gooio*) / and the passion (*himeros*) for it had gone from his mind and body" (24.513–14) does he look to Priam "in pity" (*oiktirôn*) (24.516). But how can we explain this transformation from mourning to pity? And why would this appeal for pity work now and not for the Embassy in Book 9? The answer, I think, lies in a reflection that grows out of the loss of his dearest friend, Patroklos. Sandel writes in his discussion of ethical deliberation, "Friendship becomes a way of knowing as well as liking" (1998.181). As Phoenix reminds Achilles, one's identity does not exist prior to attachments to others. Rather, the "contours" of identity are, themselves, constituted through attachments to others, whether as the esteem we get from others or as the care we show for others (Sandel 1998.180). Who I am, what I understand as my wants, aims, and desires, are not simply my own. This understanding of who I am may be subject to reflection and revision as my actions affect myself and as they affect another.

Where Achilles had earlier seen himself as able to remove himself from the suffering of others, his feeling of pity is guided now by a sense of himself as vulnerable to the loss of another. Achilles first experiences this vulnerability, as a suffering-with, when the death of Patroklos precipitates a corresponding loss of self. The appearance of Priam now calls to mind Achilles' own vulnerability to the future suffering of Peleus as well. Whereas the vulnerability experienced through the death of Patroklos is immediate, the vulnerability to Peleus's suffering is both immediate, as Achilles experiences Peleus's absence, and more distant, as Achilles projects himself into the experience of Peleus. As Priam pleads for the return of his slaughtered son, Achilles imagines himself through the eyes of Peleus. Achilles' vagabondage, which served before as an expression of the violation of his esteem by the Achaians, is now seen through the eyes of another (9.648, 16.59).

Achilles, through the imagined eyes of Peleus, appears as “a single all-untimely child” who gives his father “no care as he grows old” (24.541–42). The pain of Achilles’ wandering is experienced as a loss of esteem: not as he is denied the recognition of others but as he fails to care for his father (as he failed to care for Patroklos). In this projection, Achilles is able to imagine himself similarly through the eyes of Priam. Achilles appears to Priam as he does to Peleus: as the occasion for their suffering. After describing the suffering he has brought to his father, Achilles laments, “I sit here in Troy, and bring nothing but sorrow to you and your children” (24.542). Achilles is able to sense not just the suffering, but his own responsibility for this suffering that he has brought to Priam and that he brings to Peleus.

The suffering of others, which once appeared to Achilles as the fulfillment by Zeus of Achilles’ own wishes, now appears as a necessary consequence of the intertwining and colliding of fates. Where the “gods themselves have no sorrows (*akêdees*)” (24.526), states Achilles, the life of mortals is one in which they encounter both good fortune and evil. For those who receive from the “urn of evils,” Zeus “makes a failure / of man, and the evil hunger drives (*elaunei*) him over the shining / earth, and he wanders (*phoitai*) respected neither of gods nor mortals” (24.531–33).³⁷ Achilles no longer sees himself as removed from mortal suffering but as inextricably linked to the movement of fate in the mortal realm. Zeus’s fulfillment of Achilles’ oath, as he comes to see, brings about the death of Patroklos. Peleus, too, is stricken by Zeus: Achilles’ father once “outshone all men beside for his riches / and pride of possession, and was lord over the Myrmidons,” but now suffers from the evils of Zeus as his son sits “far from the land of his fathers” (24.535–36, 541–42). A similarly undeserved plight has befallen Priam. As Achilles states to Priam, “And you, old sir, we are told you prospered once” and “you were lord once in your wealth and your children” (24.543, 546). But the “Uranian gods,” continues Achilles, brought the Achaians, who are “an affliction upon you” (24.547). Priam is transformed from once a lord to now a suppliant, covered in dung, and soon to lose his city. What unites the suffering of Achilles, Priam, and Peleus is the collision of their fates; as Priam is about to lose his home, Achilles will not return home, and Peleus will die alone.

37 This interpretation runs contrary to the suggestion that the urns are an “artistic” motif used by the poet to “satisfy his audience’s desire to find an order and rationality in human experience” (Edwards 1987.136).

The undeserved nature of Priam's suffering is heightened by the esteem Achilles develops toward the king.³⁸ He recognizes immediately a certain nobility in Priam's heart. Achilles asks, "How could you dare to come alone to the ships of the Achaians / and before my eyes, when I am one who have killed in such numbers / such brave sons of yours? The heart in you is iron" (24.519–21). This esteem will be expressed later, as well, when Achilles is described as seeing Priam's "brave looks" and listening "to him talking" (24.630, 632). In this awareness is a comprehension of a "who," of a distinctive story of a life. Created in this encounter is a space, born of esteem for another, in which a human life appears not as an instrument of Achilles' revenge, but is allowed to appear through its unique story.

THE POLITICS OF PITY

Achilles tells Priam to "bear up (*anscheo*)" (24.549).³⁹ There is the risk that they will become frozen in grief—like Niobe, among the rocks, "stone still, she broods on the sorrows that the gods gave her" (24.617)—unable to reconcile themselves to a past for which they must suffer, but which they could neither foresee nor control. But what can make such endurance possible, particularly given Achilles' description of a world of coming and going in which fortunes shift and lords become wanderers?

In addressing this question, scholars find recourse in the aesthetics of the meeting between Priam and Achilles. For Griffin, "From suffering comes song, and song gives pleasure" (1980.102). The hero endures "not so much for his own glory, not even so much for his friends, as for the glory of song" (1980.102). Redfield suggests that this reconciliation takes "place on the level of nature, outside the human world" (1994.219). Whitman identifies an aesthetic awareness in their meeting as "Priam and Achilles see life whole, and with the freedom of men on the last verge of time, they forget the present circumstances, and admire each other's beauty."⁴⁰ For Rabel, pleasure is a "mortal hero's enjoyment in the reflection of his own ironhearted endurance in suffering" (1997.205). And for Crotty, Achilles comes to recognize the "poetics" of the epic as he enters into a new kind of fellowship

38 See Aristotle *Rhet.* II.viii.7, II.viii.16.

39 See Richardson 1985.329 on the appearance of the theme of endurance in later literature.

40 Whitman 1958.219. See also Crotty, who suggests that the "understanding of grief" results in "delight" (1994.103).

with Priam (1994.99). This fellowship does not provide any “common project” or “cooperative effort,” but serves only to enable Priam and Achilles to “better understand what each has experienced” (Crotty 1994.84). Out of this experience comes a vision of an “elemental human solidarity” in which Priam and Achilles are bound to each other through their common experience of suffering.⁴¹

What is striking in these formulations is how this vision of human solidarity is elevated above or placed outside of politics and political community. This runs contrary to a continual linkage in the *Iliad* between private acts and public consequences, whether the lust of Paris, the greed of Agamemnon, the wrath of Achilles, or the pride of Hektor. The epic continually places these individual volitions in a public context, showing how communities suffer and, in fact, are endangered through the collisions of human action and reaction. Only a handful of scholars have attempted to place this expression of pity in a political context. Burkert shows how pity relates to, and is brought into tension with, an aristocratic ethic (1955.126–34). Seaford argues that Priam’s supplication stops the excessive mourning of Achilles. This allows the *Iliad* to end by emphasizing a “public death ritual” suggestive of a polis-society, as opposed to the lavish private rituals of early Dark Age society (1994.182). Where Seaford takes this to imply a sixth-century B.C. dating of the *Iliad* (1994.144–54), Zanker suggests that the establishment of a “morality beyond reciprocity” would be important in Dark Age society for binding “the distinct community of *aristoi* in crossing ‘tribal’ boundaries” (1996.135). My interest here is less in locating the *Iliad* in a particular period than in showing how the expression of pity addresses a fundamental political problem that is raised in the *Iliad*: how does one give endurance to communities made fragile by the very nature of human connectedness? Pity provides the foundation for a political ethic that makes possible community life in the context of community suffering. Where Schadewaldt sees pity as elemental and not ethical (1955.137–38), my suggestion here is that pity is ethical because it rests upon a sense of one’s esteem as connected to others. Pity requires a sense of vulnerability in which our connectedness to each other makes our deeds, in Arendt’s words, both “irretrievable” and “unpredictable” (1958.188–92). And pity is guided by a sense of care for others that arises from this vulnerability. No longer able to

41 Schein 1984.159. See also Burkert 1955.107, MacLeod 1982.16, and Zanker 1996.125.

count on the gods “who have no sorrows (*akêdees*)” (24.526) and who bestow good and bad fortune upon mortals, and no longer able, by himself, to control the path to his future because of the interconnectedness of himself to others, Achilles’ actions toward Priam point to the possibility of projecting themselves into a future.⁴² Two actions, in particular, allow for this restoration: releasing and promising.⁴³

The first of these actions, releasing, allows for the possibility of projecting the world into the future by answering to the irretrievability of action. The meeting between Priam and Achilles in Book 24 is premised, most obviously, on the release of Hektor’s corpse. So Thetis tells Achilles that the gods are concerned that he has not released (*apelusas*) Hektor’s body (24.136; see also 24.115, 116). The corpse, though, is the material manifestation of a deeper predicament. Achilles and Priam are “confined” to the consequences of their actions that, by the nature of acting among others, they could neither predict, control, nor now retrieve (see Arendt 1958.237). Releasing, thus, is not just a return of a body but a freeing from an inner confinement to the past.

This confinement to the past is suggested both by the desire for vengeance and by the feelings of sorrow that cannot, by themselves, end. Vengeance can neither end, because it is always a reaction, nor satisfy, because it cannot reverse the original deed. Thus, in Book 9, Phoenix implores Achilles to “throw your anger aside” (9.517), and Ajax fears that

42 See Heidegger 1979 for his discussion of “understanding” as a “projecting towards a potentiality-for-Being” (385–89). Though the term is from Heidegger, my discussion more closely follows Arendt. My notion of projection points to a disagreement with Schadewaldt. Schadewaldt suggests that Achilles’ decision is one of “pure presence” (*reine Gegenwart*) that arises from “ganzen Sein in einem Zustand der Erhebung” (1959.267). There is an interesting parallel to Heidegger’s notion of “*ecstases*.” For Schadewaldt, the moment of “Exaltation” (*Erhebung*) does now “know” a “before” (*Vorher*) or “after” (*Nachher*), but exists at the moment of “what has been and what is to come” (*des Gewesenen und des Kommenden*). So, for Heidegger, the “*ecstases*” of temporality is the experience of a “pure sequence of ‘nows’” that bring together the “the phenomena of the future (*Zukunft*), the character of having been (*Gewesenheit*), and the Present (*Gegenwart*)” (1962.377/1979.329). For Schadewaldt, Achilles’ decision is not directed by any burden of the past or anticipation of the future, but exists as a pure moment in time. Heidegger, on the other hand, suggests that the coming together of the past, present, and future makes possible the projecting-forward of the individual into the future. I am arguing that Achilles engages in just such a projecting-forth as he binds himself and his community, through a promise, to Priam.

43 I am drawing on Arendt 1958.236–47.

ruin will come because Achilles' anger cannot be placated. Achilles sets aside his anger toward Agamemnon so that he may pursue a more consuming rage toward Hektor. Achilles seeks his vengeance not only by killing Hektor and sacrificing twelve captives but also by attempting tirelessly, and without satisfaction, to desecrate Hektor's corpse. The unfortunate truth is that Patroklos will not come back, no matter what form of vengeance is taken. Without release, Achilles is caught in a reactive cycle that knows no future. After dragging Hektor's body around the city, he then drags Hektor's body "three times" around the tomb of Patroklos (24.16), ending where he began.

Achilles' inability to release himself from the sorrow of loss is suggested in the opening of Book 24, which begins on a note of contrast: the funeral games broke up (*luto d' agôn*) and the people scattered, thinking about their dinner and sleep, but Achilles remains behind, weeping for Patroklos (24.1–13). Thetis asks Achilles, "My child, how long will you go on eating your heart out in sorrow / and lamentation, and remember neither your food nor going / to bed?" (24.128–30). Food and drink will not pass Achilles' "dear (*philon*) throat" now that Patroklos has fallen (19.209, trans. modified). As Benveniste notes, *philos*, in modifying "throat," suggests the intimacy of the association between Achilles and Patroklos. Food and drink will not pass his *philon* throat because, "The sorrow of Achilles is that of a *philos*, and the feeling of having lost his *hetairos* makes him put aside all desire for food" (1973.286). Food and drink are not just necessary for human survival, they are aspects of *philotês*, whether the friendship of intimacy, community, or toward guests. The loss of a *philos* who is so dear renders Achilles unwilling to participate in these activities of community. The image of digestion appears, as well, in the use of *pessô* to describe the confinement to one's sorrows. *Pessô*, which is associated with swallowing or digesting, also means "brood," suggesting a sorrow that does not go away but remains within the person (as though indigestible). Niobe is unable to eat or drink, but, instead, she forever "broods" (*pessei*) about her sorrows (24.617). And Priam neither tastes food nor sleeps because he "broods" (*pessei*) over his suffering (24.639).

The meeting between Priam and Achilles allows for a release from the suffering each has brought. In telling Priam that he "is minded / to give (*lusai*) Hektor back" (24.560–61), Achilles experiences a release of the grief that had bound his heart in this reactive cycle of vengeance and sorrow. Before, Achilles' love of Patroklos had excluded any pity or care for the return of Hektor's corpse. Achilles dismisses Hektor's entreaty to ransom

the corpse back to his family (22.338–43). Patroklos will be buried properly, proclaims Achilles, but Hektor shall lie on the plain to be “fouly” ripped by dogs and vultures (22.335–36).

In the expression of pity toward Priam, though, Achilles calls for the servants to wash, anoint, and clothe Hektor’s corpse and then “Achilles himself lifted him and laid him / on a litter” (24.581–90). The cleaning of Hektor, which parallels Achilles’ treatment of Patroklos’ corpse, does not signal a love of Achilles for Hektor. It does, however, correspond to the extension of the language of *philos* by Achilles. He is able to imagine his love for Patroklos as having a parallel in Priam’s love for Hektor. This so clearly challenges the exclusive love that he had for Patroklos that Achilles even calls to his “beloved (*philon*) companion” not to be angry since he has given back Priam’s “beloved (*philon*) son” to his “loved (*philôi*) father” (24.591, 619, 594).

This more inclusive language of *philos* is played out symbolically as both Achilles and Priam can “remember” their dinner (24.601) and sleep. Confined to the sorrow for one who is beloved (*philotês*), neither food nor drink could pass their dear (*philous*) throats. Like Achilles, Priam could only digest (*pessô*) his sorrow. Now, with the release of Hektor, both can taste food and drink again. As Priam exclaims to Achilles, “Now I have tasted (*pasamên*) food again and have let the gleaming / wine go down my throat. Before, I had tasted (*pepasmên*) nothing” (24.641–42). Through this release, the eternal brooding of Niobe, frozen in time by the impossibility of release, is replaced by images of eating, drinking, and sleeping.

Where “releasing” answers to the irretrievability of the past, the second action, promising, answers to the unpredictability of the future. This unpredictability arises, as Arendt suggests, from “the impossibility of remaining unique masters” of what we do, “of knowing its consequences and relying upon the future” (1958.244). The promise does not guarantee the future any more than it provides mastery over the present. What promising does is give some durability to a human community by projecting it into the future. That is, the promise suggests a stance of responsibility for the future in which individuals, recognizing their connectedness, bind themselves to each other.

Promises, more than any other act, bind Homeric communities together. Oaths, guest friendships, ties of reciprocity, and the distribution of material rewards all rest on promises that are essential to the maintenance of a community space. In fact, the Achaian community is jeopardized by its broken promise to Achilles when it retrieves the gifts that had been given.

This broken promise prompts Achilles not only to refuse to fight but also to withdraw to a realm in which he will not be bound, through promises or obligations, to others. Achilles will be bound only by his promise to himself: that he will bring unendurable suffering and loss to the Achaian community.

Even in his reentrance into battle, Achilles promises only to Patroklos. He ignores Agamemnon's offer of his oath that he did not sleep with Briseis. And he rejects Hektor's offer of an agreement (*harmoniê*) that whoever wins should return the corpse to the community. Achilles' answer is telling, as he responds that he cannot make agreements (*sunêmosunas*) with someone whose deeds he will not forget (22.261). Caught in a reactive cycle of vengeance, Achilles is unable to make any such promise. "As there are no trustworthy oaths (*horkia pista*) between men and lions / nor wolves and lambs have spirit that can be brought to agreement (*homophrona*) / but forever these hold feelings of hate for each other / so there can be no love between you and me, nor shall there be / oaths (*horkia*) between us" (22.262–66). There is something distinctively human about this ability to promise, as it rests upon a like-mindedness (*homophrôn*) that only humans share.

Now, though, Achilles binds himself to Priam. When Achilles addresses Priam as "friend (*phile*)" (24.650), he fulfills Priam's wish "for love (*philon*) and pity (*eleeinon*)" (24.309). This language is restorative as it establishes a relationship in which they become bound together through a promise (see Benveniste 1973.278–81). Achilles asks the king to tell him how many days will be needed for the burial of Hektor so "I myself shall stay still and hold back the people" (24.658). Priam responds, saying this "is what you could do and give me pleasure (*kecharismena*)" (24.661). As Richardson notes, in other situations *charizesthai* means "to oblige someone" (1985.346). Achilles seems to recognize his assumption of an obligation when he answers that this "shall be done as you ask it. / I will hold off our attack for as much time as you bid me" (24.669–70). Coming from Achilles, who has "destroyed pity" (24.44), such a statement that he will honor the agreement would be met rightly with some hesitancy. And Achilles seems to recognize this as he grasps Priam's wrist "so that his heart might have no fear" (24.672). This act, following on his words, allows Priam and Achilles to move from eternal mourning to an anticipation of a future. Though Achilles will die in battle, he cares for himself now for the first time. Where before he remembered neither "food nor going to bed" (24.129–30), indifferent to his own future, Achilles now eats with Priam (24.601) and sleeps with Briseis (24.676). In contrast to Foucault's claim that "the care of

the self is ethically prior” to a “care for others” (1997.287), what Achilles discovers is that the care of the self, as a matter of self-esteem, is inextricably bound up with others.

Achilles’ promise is unlike earlier promises in the *Iliad* because it does not rest on even the possibility of getting something in return (see Zanker 1996.117–18). Achilles knows he will die, and Priam knows his city will fall. Yet, this promise is significant because it allows the *Iliad* to close on the poignant image of a Trojan community space. In contrast to the scene on Achilles’ shield in which the city’s people await an ambush, now, in Priam’s words, “Achilles promised (*epetelle*) me, as he sent me on my way from the black ships, / that none should do us injury until the twelfth dawn comes” (24.780–81). In promising to another, Achilles binds the Achaians to the Trojans. The promise is restorative of the public life of the human community, as the Trojan people (*laos*) “all were gathered to one place and assembled together (*êgerthen homêgerees t’ egenonto*)” to mourn and remember Hektor, to build a grave with stones “laid close together (*puknoisin*),” and then to have a feast in Priam’s house (24.789–90, 798, 802). The space itself is indeterminate as the fall of Troy is near. But human activity is preserved, as the *Iliad* ends with a moment of care that is set against the frailty of a world of coming and going.

THE *ILIAD* AND ETHICAL DELIBERATION

My claim is not just that one can identify the operation of an ethic in the *Iliad*, but also that the epic itself engages us in the activity of ethical deliberation. In saying this, I want to position my claim in the context of attempts by MacIntyre, Taylor, Sandel, and Rawls to identify a basis for ethical reflection. At first glance, my approach seems to share the most with MacIntyre. In arguing against attempts to derive a universally applicable ethics, MacIntyre seeks to demonstrate how ethics are grounded in cultural traditions. My disagreement with MacIntyre lies not in his locating ethics in tradition, but in his view of the Homeric configuration of traditions as consistent, unambiguous, and unified. MacIntyre’s treatment of Homeric society seems to hold out little possibility for ethical deliberation. Following Fränkel, MacIntyre assumes that “a man in heroic society is what he does” (1984.122). There is a “clear understanding of what actions are required to [be] perform[ed]” and “what actions fall short of what is required” (1984.122). Not only does MacIntyre see the heroic code as unambiguous, “evaluative questions” cannot even arise since any question of what one should do are

always “questions of social fact” (1984.123). Homeric society appears as a closed system in which “morality and social structure are in fact one and the same” (1984.123).

Taylor attempts to articulate a more discursive approach to identity in which who I am and what I want to be are defined through our language interactions with others. I am sympathetic to Taylor’s attempt to show how identity—the question of who I am—is related to one’s ethical orientation—the question of how I orient my actions in my relationship to others. What connects one’s image of oneself with one’s ethical orientation toward others is, in its most general sense, respect. Respect does not mean one thing but, as Taylor points out, involves three related issues: “our sense of respect for and obligations to others,” our notion of “what makes a full life,” and our “dignity” as those “characteristics by which we think of ourselves as commanding (or failing to command) the respect of those around us” (1989.15). Yet, for Taylor, Homeric society looks remarkably simple. Drawing exclusively on Adkins, Taylor argues that concern with the respect of others was “paramount” and incorporated one’s understanding of a full life “without remainder” (1989.16). To the extent that a sense of respect for and obligation to others existed at all, it was “grounded in religious prohibitions which brooked no discussion” (1989.16).

Though much of Rawls’s attempt to ground ethics in rationality may seem quite distant from the Iliadic narrative, his discussion of “moral shame” is quite helpful here. For Rawls, moral shame arises when a man’s conduct undercuts those aims that “are felt to be a condition of his being valued and esteemed by those with whom he cares to associate” (Rawls 1971.444–45 [1999.390]). Shame, for Rawls, “implies an especially intimate connection with our person and with those upon whom we depend to confirm the sense of our own worth” (Rawls 1971.443 [1999.388–89]). What is important in Rawls’s account, and is borne out in the *Iliad*, is how shame can be a “moral feeling” as it connects our own sense of worth to our actions and responsibilities toward others (Rawls 1971.443 [1999.389]).

In assessing Rawls’s argument, Sandel suggests that the “scope of reflection” allowed by Rawls is actually restricted to assessments of how different plans of action affect an agent’s desires and to evaluations of “the relative intensity” of an “agent’s wants and desires themselves” (1998.159). Lacking, suggests Sandel, is the role of the agent as a “strong evaluator” (1998.160). The term is from Taylor and denotes the ability to engage in an evaluation of the “qualitative *worth* of different desires” that are not “rendered valid by our own desires, inclinations, or choices” (Taylor 1985.16

and 1989.4). In Sandel's critique of Rawls, nothing like deliberation could occur because self-knowledge, as "an awareness of our immediate wants and desires," would be given "transparently to our awareness" and would be known "'in an instant,' before anything recognizably deliberative could begin" (1998.160). Identity is never brought into question because reflection is limited to an evaluation of what desires we have and not to "the self standing behind the wants and desires it surveys" (1998.159).

Rawls's account of shame, however, does not seem to preclude a notion of reflection on the worth of one's different desires. Rawls suggests that desires become subject to reflection and reevaluation either because they do not allow us to fulfill our broader aims or because the desires that give rise to these aims are seen as "out of line."⁴⁴ To be sure, Rawls's discussion is limited on this score, in large part because he is attempting to show how the importance of esteem is consistent with a set of aims that can be rationally derived.⁴⁵ But I think we can meaningfully extend some of Rawls's argument by showing how esteem—as a sense of one's worth—can serve as a basis for ethical reflection. What Achilles experiences with the death of Patroklos is a diminished sense of himself, a loss of worth. That sense of injury is not reducible to a simple failure of Achilles to live up to the social standards of a warrior culture, if for no other reason than the standards are quite ambiguous on this point. Achilles' initial reaction to the violation of his worth, as well as his later refusal of gifts, all seem consistent with the norms of a warrior society yet come into conflict with Achilles' sense of failure to stand by Patroklos. The stimulus for Achilles' restatement of what counts as a worthwhile life is the immediacy of the pain that results from acting on his desires; namely, his desire to restore his esteem by humiliating Agamemnon. What is clarified for Achilles is what he desires most: not the humiliation of Agamemnon but the return of Patroklos. As Achilles' sense of worth appears implicated in his attachments to others, his desires, too, must be brought into line with these broader considerations. Achilles' meeting with Priam reflects these considerations as his desire to mutilate Hektor's corpse gives way to pity. The story Achilles shares with Priam in Book 24 arises from a recognition that human attachments render us vulnerable to loss and responsible for care.

44 Rawls 1971.419 (1999.368). See also 1971.415 (1999.364).

45 Rawls 1971.404–07, 440 (1999.355–58, 386).

Plato is correct in seeing in the *Iliad* aspects of suffering, vulnerability, remorse, and pity rather than investigations of that which is immutable. He is incorrect in concluding that such attention to the particulars of human experience serve only to glut our emotions and tell us little about how to live. The importance of the epic is that it invites reflection on the exigencies of human enactment. The epic moves us to a comprehension of ethical relationships with others, relationships that are grounded not in the philosophic world of autonomy, universality, invulnerability, and transcendence but in the Homeric world of contingency, particularity, vulnerability, and immanence. As we are drawn into this world, we come to see ourselves as another, not in an empathetic moment in which we become the other, but in an act of initiative in which, as we share a world of human enactment, we come to see ourselves as both doers and sufferers (Arendt 1958.190). The story Homer tells us, like the story Achilles tells Priam, is one in which we are moved toward a recognition of a shared world, a recognition that arises not from outside but from within a world constituted by experience.

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